DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 241 905 CS 007 543

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TITLE Selection and Evaluation of Reading Strategies: The Instructional Feature Analysis.
PUB DATE Nov 83
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English (73rd, Denver, CO, November 18-23, 1983).
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Class Activities; Elementary Education; *Evaluation Methods; Instructional Improvement; *Learning Processes; Learning Strategies; Models; *Reading Instruction; Reading Processes; *Reading Strategies; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Grids; *Instructional Feature Analysis

ABSTRACT

Instructional Feature Analysis allows teachers to explain, articulate, and evaluate the processes by which students learn and the activities that involve students in those processes. To develop an Instructional Feature Analysis, teachers must first ask what processes their students need to engage in if they are to learn from a reading assignment. The teachers use these processes as titles for a column across the top of a grid and then list sample activities from which they might choose along the left side of the grid. To evaluate the strength of each activity, teachers might use a scale of 1 to 5 in each of the boxes. In examining the completed grid, teachers can see that some activities promote certain processes but not others. (Tables include a sample grid demonstrating sample semantic feature analysis--a source of instructional feature analysis--and a grid showing instructional feature analysis.) (MM)

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ED241905

Selection and Evaluation of Reading Strategies:

The Instructional Feature Analysis

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Selection and Evaluation of Reading Strategies:

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Classroom teachers are regularly confronted with the task of selecting activities to help students comprehend and learn from reading assignments. This is especially true in the content areas because a reading assignment may be central to the teacher's expected learning outcomes.

Suggestions for possible activities abound from teacher educators in methods classes, journal articles, and in reading methods books. These suggestions, although usually based on research or sound reasoning, are made in isolation from a real classroom context. As a result, successful teachers, more often than not, adapt activities to accomodate the characteristics of their particular classrooms. Likewise, creative teachers develop their own comprehension activities to meet the needs of their students, content, curriculum, and classroom.

This resourcefulness and creativity is laudable and should be encouraged; however, teachers need a vehicle by which they can explain why one activity is superior to another for certain goals. Further, they need to be able to objectively articulate their reasoning for selecting one activity over another or for modifying an activity for particular needs. Finally, they need to be able to evaluate the quality of their activities according to a learning theory. The purpose of this article is to provide just such a vehicle. The Instructional Feature Analysis, explained herein, provides a means by which a teacher can explain,

articulate, and evaluate the processes by which students learn and the activities which involve students in those processes. In addition, methods professors, inservice instructors, and supervisors can present, evaluate, and relate instructional strategies to the features of a learning theory by using the Instructional Feature Analysis.

Background

The Instructional Feature Analysis has its roots in two sources of scholarly literature. The first is in a strategy, the Semantic Feature Analysis, suggested by Johnson and Pearson (1978). The Semantic Feature Analysis (SFA) is a vocabulary development activity which helps learners understand the connotations of words and the relationship between and among those words and categories of ideas. When using a Semantic Feature Analysis the teacher designs a grid. The words to be learned are listed down the side of the grid on the left. The categories are column headings across the top of the grid. The teacher and students then discuss the relationship between each of the words and categories. Johnson and Pearson suggest that young or unsophisticated students fill in the boxes of the grid with a symbol system such as the one in the sample SFA in Table One. After the teacher explains the category

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Insert Table 1 About Here

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headings and the vocabulary words the students and teacher discuss the relationship which exists between the words and the ideas. For example,

the class might decide that there is a "-", or negative relationship between "search and seizure" and a "citizen's right to privacy." If that were the case, a "-" would be placed in the appropriate box.

Anders and Bos (1983) have found this to be a very effective activity for pre-teaching social studies vocabulary to adolescent disabled readers who participated in the Semantic Feature Analysis shown in Table One and then read a passage in which those words and ideas comprised the jist of the reading assignment.

The second root of the Instructional Feature Analysis is found in LaZanskey, Johnston and Spencer (1984). They suggest that there are "critical differences between... strategies which relate to their adaptability and suitability across instructional situations." The Instructional Feature Analysis, which takes the form of a Semantic Feature Analysis, is designed to portray the adaptability and suitability of a teacher's comprehension activities and the processes believed to be inherent in student learning.

The IFA

The first step in developing an Instructional Feature Analysis is to determine the processes a learner goes through when reading to learn. In other words, a teacher needs to ask, What are the processes my students probably need to engage in order to successfully learn from this reading assignment? These become the titles for the columns across the top of the grid. Table Two provides an example of what some of those category headings might be. Sample activities from which a teacher

might choose are then listed in the column on the left. See Table Two for sample activities. In order to evaluate the strength of each activity, then, the teacher might use a scale of 1 to 5 in each of the boxes. The numbers in each of the boxes in Table Two represent the consensus of a group of 98 teachers when they filled out the grid. Examination of the grid reveals that some activities promote certain processes but not others. For example, a teacher could use, with some degree of confidence, a Brainstorming activity to activate prior knowledge and create and enhance interest. On the other hand, Brainstorming is probably not a very reliable activity to promote either the processes of application or review and recitation. The structured overview, appears to be a relatively good activity to promote all processes, with the exception of application.

It is not the purpose of this article to defend either the activities or the processes displayed in Table Two. Any professional is able to determine their own categories and activities according to the learning theory to which one ascribes. Rather, the important point is that by creating such a grid one is able to explain, articulate, and evaluate the learning activities being used in a classroom.

Conclusion

It is a sign of the times that teachers must be able to objectively explain why they are doing what they are doing. It is equally important that supervisors and evaluators of teachers have some means of evaluating the activities in which teachers engage their students. While

teaching will always be both an unexplainable art and a science, it is important to objectify and make scientific wherever possible. The Instructional Feature Analysis is a vehicle by which this might be done.

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Table One

Sample Semantic Feature Analysis

THE FOURTH AMENDMENT

Important Vocabulary	Important Ideas: Citizen's right to privacy versus Society needs to keep law and order	Police search with a search warrant	Police search without a search warrant	Evidence allowed in court
search and seizure				
unreasonable search and seizure				
probable cause to search				
your property and possessions				
absolute privacy				
you give consent				
hot pursuit				
moving vehicle				
stop-and-frisk				
plain view				
during an arrest				
evidence				
exclusionary rule				

Table 2

A Model Instructional Feature Analysis

Strategies	Processes				
	Activates Prior Knowledge	Organizes Prior & New Knowledge	Creates & Enhances Interest	Encourages Application	Provides for Review & Recitation
1. Brainstorming (Estes & Vaughan, 1978)	5	3	4	1	1
2. Structured Overview (Earle, 1969; Barron, 1969)	5	5	4	2	3
3. Semantic Feature Analysis (Johnson & Pearson, 1978)	4	4	4	2	3
4. Concept Guide (Estes and Vaughan, 1978)	2	4	4	4	1
5. Reaction Guide (Readance, Bean, & Baldwin, 1981)	3	2	4	3	2

Note: The numbers represent the relative degree that an activity promotes a process. A "5" indicates that the process is activated to a high degree, a "1" indicates that the process is activated to a very low degree.